

UNREPORTED CRIME

A survey by Lynne Featherstone, April 2004

Background

On the basis of both anecdotal and documented evidence that many crimes are not reported to the police, I undertook a survey to provide a snapshot of the level of the unreporting of crime. In doing so I was particularly interested in why people did not report crimes to the police and what these reasons show about the level of public confidence in the police service and their accessibility.

Survey

Included in a wider survey on crime and disorder that was sent out to residents in Haringey in North London during the second half of last year, questions on the reporting of crime were included. In light of resource constraints the survey had to be limited to a particular part of London.

Respondents were asked whether they had been a victim of or witness to a crime in the last year, and if they answered yes, whether they reported it to the police. Those who answered no were asked why they did not report the crime to the police. Those who answered yes were asked whether they were satisfied or not with the speed of the police's response and the follow-up work by the police afterwards.

2093 replies were received.

Findings

The full results of the survey are in Appendix A.

- Of those who responded, 1119 experienced or witnessed a crime in the last year (54%)
- Of these, 421 did not report the crime to the police (38%)
- Of those who did not report the crime, 215 did not do so because they did not think the police would act or because they could not get hold of the police (51%).
- Of those who did not report the crime, 133 did not do so because they thought the crime concerned was not important enough (31%)
- Of those who did report it, 224 were not satisfied with the speed of the police response (34%) while 324 were not satisfied with the work of the police to follow up the report (49%).

Implications

The survey represents a snapshot of the extent of the non-reporting of crime in a particular area of London.

The results from the survey indicate that a significant level of crime goes unreported. This confirms findings from the MPS' own Public Attitudes Survey¹ as well as the Home Office's annual British Crime Survey. However the level of unreported crime suggested by the results is alarmingly high – over a 1/3 of crime may go unreported. This has significant implications for our understanding of the true level of crime, and for the setting of targets and the consequent allocation of resources.

If we assume that the results reflect the picture across the whole of London, urgent action is needed to redress this balance. Ensuring that crimes are reported to the police will not only provide us with a picture of the true level of crime in London, but will also help in the fight against crime by ensuring the police have more information, and more local intelligence.

Of particular interest in this survey are the reasons given for the non-reporting of crime. Over half of those who did not report the crime they experienced or witnessed to the police, didn't do so because they thought the police would not act or because they could not get hold of the police. This suggests a significant lack of trust and confidence in the MPS, and reflects the frequently cited belief that 'there is no point in contacting the police because they will not do anything about it anyway.' The fact that almost half of those who did report the crime in question to the police were not satisfied with the work done to follow up the report adds significant weight to the validity of this view, and highlights a significant gap between what the public expects, and what the police delivers.

The findings reinforce concerns about the underperformance of the MPS on measures of public and customer satisfaction. The latest update to the MPA's Planning, Performance and Review Committee shows that the percentage of the public satisfied with police action in response to 999 calls, for example, remains well below target². Research I conducted last year on the poor performance of police stations in answering non-urgent calls highlighted the problems the public face in accessing and contacting the police. This might contribute to some of the unreporting of crime.

Conclusions

I welcome the increased focus on 'reassurance' policing and the introduction of Safer Neighbourhoods. I am concerned however that not enough is being done to address the implications of a high level of unreported crime, to improve the quality of the

¹ The MPS' Public Attitudes Survey 2002/3 found that about 1 in 20 residents were the victim of a crime that they did not report to the police.

² Target 85%; performance 78.3% (end February 2004).

delivery of policing at the point of contact with the public, and to facilitate easier access to the police by the public at large.

I therefore make the following suggestions of steps to take to address the issues raised by my survey:

- Incorporate assessments of unreported crime within the baselines for the setting of performance measures and targets, and to inform planning the allocation of resources, including within RAF.
- Build into the reassurance programme specific measures designed to improve the *quality* of police contact with the public, and expedite the implementation of the recommendations of last year's Demand Management BVR.
- Help the public understand what they can, and can't, expect from their local police to close the gap between what the public demands and the police can deliver and foster a higher level of trust.
- Act on the findings and recommendations of my report in 2003 on police response to non-urgent calls with a view to improving the accessibility of the police.

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Appendix A

<u>Questions</u>	<u>Total</u>
Have you been the victim of or witnessed a crime in the last year	
Yes:	1119
No:	1101
NA:	56
If yes, did you report it to the police?	
Yes:	659
No:	421
NA:	39
Why not:	
Someone else did	93
Didn't know how to	10
Would have taken too long	46
Crime wasn't important enough	133
Couldn't get hold of police	15
Didn't think police would act	200
Reported it to someone else	14
Other	28
If you did report it, were you satisfied with the speed of the police's response	
Yes	350
No	224
If you did report it, were you satisfied with the work the police did to follow up the report	
Yes	240
No	324